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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PARM MOPS IZ CA UN

SUBJECT: IRAQ/UN: CANADIAN REACTION TO FEBRUARY 14

INSPECTORS' REPORT

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Brian Flora,  
Reasons 15. (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Canadian Foreign Minister Bill Graham, speaking to the press after the February 14 weapons inspectors' report to the UN Security Council, said that the report shows progress as well as the need for continued pressure on Iraq. Graham said that while no-one is excluding the use of force, that is the last resort, and there is still a chance war can be avoided. Echoing Prime Minister Chretien's February 13 speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Graham emphasized the importance of staying faithful to the UN process and Resolution 1441. He argued that no country, including the United States, intended to move immediately against Iraq. When pressed on whether Canada would participate in a military campaign against Iraq that did not have UN blessing, Graham refused to speculate.

¶2. (SBU) Early reaction in the Canadian media was that the inspectors' report supports the French argument for continued inspections. Commentators noted that Blix and El-Baradei felt there was still useful work to be done, and that they are still building their capacity.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: While the GoC continues to keep its options open, the inspectors' report does not help our case here in the court of public opinion. Chretien's Liberal Party is split over Iraq, with four backbench MPs voting for a February 11 opposition resolution requiring explicit UNSC endorsement for action if Canadian were to participate. So long as the inspectors say they are making progress and the Security Council is not ready to abandon that process, the GoC will find it hard to disagree.

¶4. (C) COMMENT CONT'D: Graham did tell the press that time is "very limited" for Iraq, but the GoC would clearly prefer some accommodation between the U.S. and France in the Security Council. In that vein, we note that Graham also mentioned he would be discussing Iraq later on February 14 with the Mexican Foreign Minister. As for the NATO dispute over support to Turkey, Foreign Affairs contacts tell us that Graham and Political Director Jim Wright took the French Ambassador to task this week over France's continued obstruction.

KELLY